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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews changes in the philosophy of student evaluation over time as reflected by the elimination of the standardized testing program originally administered by the Ontario Ministry of Education. It presents the development of a more student oriented approach to evaluation as reflected in recent Ministry issued curriculum documents. It contrasts with this the apparent philosophy underlying the suggested use of the Ministry developed "Ontario Assessment Instrument Pool" (OAIP), a bank of assessment instruments for the re-implementation of province-wide testing. The Etobicoke Board of Education's (EBE) response to a perceived need within the system was to develop a resource document on student evaluation: "Making the Grade, Evaluating and Reporting Student Progress." It is a statement of (1) the philosophy of the EBE in regard to education and its outcomes as well as student evaluation; and (2) the responsibilities of the system, the schools and the teachers in regard to evaluating student progress. It also fills the unelaborated Ministry requirements as stated in curriculum documents for student assessment and evaluation. However, it stands in opposition to the philosophy that would see OAIP used for province-wide testing. (Author/PN)

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LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF A STUDENT EVALUATION RESOURCE DOCUMENT IN RESPONSE TO AN UNELABORATED MINISTRY REQUIREMENT

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ABSTRACT

The paper reviews changes in the philosophy of student evaluation over time as reflected by the elimination of the standardized testing program originally administered by the Ministry of Education. It presents the development of a more student oriented approach to evaluation as reflected in recent Ministry issued currriculum documents. It contrasts with this the apparent philosophy underlying the suggested use of the Ministry developed "Ontario Assessment Instrument Pool" (O.A.I.P.), a bank of assessment instruments, for the re-implementation of province-wide testing.

The paper then presents the Etobicoke Board of Education's response which was to develop a resource document, essentially a book, on student evaluation. This book elaborates and applies the Ministry's philosophy as expressed in its curriculum documents and is consistent with them. It stands in opposition to the philosophy that would see O.A.I.P. used for province-wide testing.

It is hoped that the Etobicoke Document on student evaluation will influence the Ministry to separate student evaluation and system accountability.

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RESOLVING THE TENSION BETWEEN CENTRALIZED PROVINCIAL DIRECTIONS AND LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD IMPLEMENTATION OF CURRICULUM STANDARDS

Local Development and Use of a Student Evaluation Resource Document in Response to an Unelaborated Ministry Requirement

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47.24 / RESOLVING THE TENSION BETWEEN CENTRALIZED PROVINCIAL DIRECTION AND LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD IMPLEMENTATION OF CURRICULUM STANDARDS (Symposium, Division H)

CHAIR *Edgar H. Wright, Toronto Board of Education (Canada)*

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An Overview of the Ontario Provincial Educational System, Its Curriculum Guidelines, Evaluation Procedures, and Provisions for Local Autonomy. *Peter Nightingale, Ontario Ministry of Education*

Concerns About Implementing Provincial Curriculum Documents Within a County School Board with Modest Program Support Staff. *Clay Lafleur, Simcoe County Board of Education (Canada)*

Local Development and Use of a Student Evaluation Resource Document in Response to an Unelaborated Ministry Requirement. *Anne E. Berens, Etobicoke Board of Education (Canada)*

A Cooperative Provincial-Local Project to Evaluate Components of a Local System with a View to Initiating Change. *H. J. Dilling, Scarborough Board of Education (Canada)*

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Local Development and Use of a Student Evaluation Resource Document in Response to an Unelaborated Ministry Requirement

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This presentation will discuss the potential for an active board response to a general Ministry directive to (a) preserve the educational philosophy of the local board, (b) fulfill the technical requirements of the Ministry directive and (c) shape further Ministry policy development.

Specifically, I will be talking about a document, **Making the Grade**, which focuses on evaluating and reporting student progress. The impetus for developing this document came both from within The Etobicoke Board of Education and from developments around student evaluation occuring in the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Some history may make clear the tensions that led the Board to write its own book on student evluation. Historically there had been province-wide standardized exams developed by the Ministry which determined whether a student passed or failed and which determined entrance to the next level of education. Gradually these centralized exams were removed.

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California, April, 1986.

(a) In 1949, Ontario-mandated "High School Entrance Examinations" were removed as a standard hurdle for Grade 8 students.

(b) In 1967, Grade 13 "Departmental Examinations" (issued by what was then the Department of Education) were eliminated.

(c) In 1970, provincial Grade 12 tests in scholastic aptitude (verbal and mathematics) and Grade 13 tests in mathematics and physics achievement were terminated.

The objective of these changes by The Ministry of Education was to allow the development of evaluation systems which were more sensitive to the changing nature of Ontario education with its variable needs over time and the multi-faceted programming being initiated across the many different local school systems. These changes also represented a withdrawal by the Ministry from the very prescriptive role it had previously played. The Ministry did continue to issue curriculum documents which specified that student evaluation was to be carried out but they reflected a changing view of the purposes of student evaluation and of the role of student outcome data in relation to a Board's accountability to the Ministry.

An example of the move away from a simple examination as the determiner of a student's level of achievement can be found in a 1972 document on Senior Division mathematics which states, "The traditional year-end examination as the primary means of promotion should be supplemented or replaced by more continuous and personal evaluation of the student's progress." However, the document went on to say that the formal examination still had value "especially if it is used to diagnose the individual needs of students."

By 1980, the following statement regarding the purpose of student evaluation appeared in an Intermediate Division mathematics guideline:

> Purpose
>
> Evaluation of student achievement and program effectiveness must be an integral, ongoing part of the teaching-learning process. It can serve the following functions:
>
> - to provide the student with information concerning what he or she has already mastered and what still needs to be learned;
> - to provide parents with information regarding their child's progress;
> - to verify the appropriateness of stated goals and objectives;
> - to provide information that will enable teachers to modify the program as needed;
> - to assess the quality and effectiveness of the learning strategies and materials that have been used;
> - to spur the student to further achievement.

In this document student evaluation seems to have become a local responsibility focused on the student and on the teaching-learning process in so far as it can be modified to further enhance the student's progress. Student evaluation thus becomes part of a feed-back loop to enhance student learning and the school becomes accountable to the parents for their child's progress. In the curriculum documents coming from the Ministry student evaluation was no longer being presented as part of Board accountability to the Ministry or Ministry accountability to the general public. But, at the same time that the shift in the stated aims of student evaluation in curriculum documents was occurring, the Ministry was also involved in the

development of a bank of student evluation materials known as the Ontario Assessment Instrument Pool, commonly called O.A.I.P.

According to the Ministry "O.A.I.P. was produced in response to public and professional need for improved techniques and strategies for evaluating student achievement and the effectiveness of programs." There was considerable concern within our Board that O.A.I.P. represented a back-door approach to once again having Ministry-mandated standardized testing. O.A.I.P was supposed to be better because it had been developed with the Ministry's curriculum guidelines in view. However, because of the ease of construction most of the instruments in the pool were simply multiple-choice test items.

These were materials which could easily be used for province-wide testing in a large number of subjects at almost every grade level. Peter Nightingale in his paper stated that, "provincial policy has called for a synthesis or 'balance' of the kinds of knowledge that meet the needs of individual pupils, the requirements of society and the requirements of the academic and practical disciplines." Ministry officials were again beginning to say that one of the requirements of society was for accountability and that to meet this requirement the Ministry would again institute province-wide testing most likely with the O.A.I.P. materials.

Let me describe O.A.I.P. The name, in large part, describes and defines the program. It is "Ontario" because the items were related to the curriculum guidelines issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education. "Assessment" emphasizes that the methods and instruments collected will be

appropriate for gathering data for assessment and measurement rather than for evaluation, which is the result of human judgement and not the mechanical outcome of the technical machinery. "Instrument" carries a broad connotation to indicate the wide range of tools available within the pool. In addition to a large number of multiple-choice test items there are suggestions for projects, written exercises, laboratory experiments and so forth. Finally, "Pool" implies a sharing, something to which many contribute and from which many can draw. The pool is open and anyone, parents and students as well as educators may purchase the materials. Materials are available for the following subjects:

- anglais (Grades 4-10)
- chemistry/chimie (Grades 11-13)
- English (Grades 7-10)
- Francais (Grades 4-10)
- French as a second language (Grades 6 and 10)
- geography/geographie (Grades 7-10)
- history/histoire (Grades 7-10)
- mathematics/mathematique (Grades 4-6)
- mathematics/mathematique (Grades 7-10)
- physics/physique (Grades 11-13)

Not all of the subjects were thoroughly covered and the quality of material varied greatly. However, as a pool it represents a tremendous amount of work. All of the materials were field-tested using multiple matrix sampling which involved giving a sample of items to each student so that, with the results of a large group of students combined, all of the items would have been used. From these tests difficulty levels were calculated so that a teacher would have an idea of how average students might be expected to perform.

Etobicoke staff were highly critical of O.A.I.P. because they felt that most guidelines were not fully covered, that it focused on rote knowledge rather than on reasoning and understanding and that it tended to discourage a teacher from tailoring a course, and the teaching process, to the needs of the students in the local community. There was also a fear that O.A.I.P. could be used for teacher evaluation and a very strong concern that it would be used, as the old provincial exams had been, as a condition for university entrance. If this happened, it was felt that the individualization of instruction and evaluation that had been promoted by the Ministry's curriculum documents would be lost in pressure to "teach to the test" from parents and students anxious about university admission.

The Ministry's statements lend credence to these concerns. In the Response to the Final Report of the Commission on Declining School Enrolments in Ontario (p.20) issued over the Minister's name it states that "The Ministries have entered into discussion with the Council of Ontario Universities to provide, ... through the agency of O.A.I.P., test instruments that can be used ... as part of the admission process." Statements such as this lead teachers to doubt that the use of O.A.I.P. will remain optional and that a multiple matrix sampling model will be used rather than an every student model.

Thus there is a lack of confidence in The Ministry in terms of whether their philosophy on student evaluation will come from the curriculum documents or whether it will come from the kinds of statements that have surrounded O.A.I.P.. There is also a fear that even if exams are not imposed on every student they may still be imposed on Boards through matrix

sampling. Thus there is tension arising from the Board's desire to use student evaluation from the benefit of the student and an expectation that the Ministry would use it for accountability purposes with cost to, but without benefit for, the individual student.

Needless to say this situation generated a considerable amount of tension and a certain amount of resentment. There had been an assumption when the Ministry divested itself of the responsibility of student evaluation that it was recognizing and accepting the concept that the professional educators in the field were capable of picking up and carrying out the evluation responsibilities. Not only that, but these professionals had, themselves, been very vocal in their requests for the chance to demonstrate their capability. As might be expected, some teachers accepted the challenge and developed procedures for evaluating student progress that were unquestioned; others, according to certain critics, did not.

The Etobicoke Board, being particularly committed to the idea that the purpose of student evaluation is to help student's learn rather than to prove to some outside group or authority that they have learned, and being pragmatic enough to recognize that not all teachers had accepted the challenge of developing good assessment procedures, decided to make student assessment and evaluation a Board priority. As part of this thrust a group of staff was drawn together to develop a resource document on student evaluation. When it was completed substantial Board resources were put into the implementation of it. The Director lent his support by mentioning student evaluation in his annual speech and sending a letter to principals saying this was an opportunity for them to show educational leadership.

Thus the Board's response to a perceived need within the system, to the Ministry's evaluation directives as expressed in their curiculum documents, and to the Board's concern about possible changes in the Ministry's direction regarding student evaluation was to produce what many of us feel is a really first class document.

That resource document is **Making the Grade, Evaluating and Reporting Student Progress**. It is more than a how-to handbook. It is a statement of the philosophy of The Etobicoke Board in regard to education and its outcomes as well as student evaluation. It is a statement of the responsibilities of the system, the schools and the teachers in regard to evaluating student progress, and it is a tremendous in-service for all of us who use the document.

The concepts, strategies and techniques as outlined in the document were "based upon the goals of education as stated by the Ministry of Education in The Formative Years (1975) and Ontario Schools: Intermediate and Senior Divisions (O.S.I.S.)(1984), and the aims of education as stated by The Etobicoke Board of Education.

One of the major concerns of the writing team was that student evaluation should become more effective. Effective in terms of making a direct contribution to advancing student learning. Their view was that "evaluation is an integral part of any education program or process." Therefore when our education programs change, as they have over the years, then our evaluation processes must also change. "Another reason for examining our evaluation techniques," as stated in the document, "is that

students judge which aspects of the curriculum are important by the emphasis placed on these aspects in the evaluation process." (p.v)

Perhaps the flavour of the document can be conveyed with a list of several important factors the team felt should be kept in mind when considering stuient evaluation:

- the need to regard evaluation as a positive component of the student's learning experience;
- the need to relate evaluation activities to the student's level of development;
- the need to have appropriate evaluation activities for different grades, divisions or subjects;
- the need to have a powerful connection among stated objectives, learning activities, and evaluation activities;
- the need to develop evaluation practices which support learning as process as well as learning as product;
- the need to modify evaluation procedures for exceptional students and to differentiate evaluation for students at different levels of ability;
- the need to determine whether or not we are truly evaluating what we <u>think</u> we are evaluating."

"The word "evaluation" is often used in a narrow sense as a synonym for "testing." A more appropriate use of the term includes <u>all</u> available methods of obtaining information regarding what the students have learned and how effective the teaching has been." (p.1) In the document emphasis is put on the idea that evaluation is a <u>systematic process</u>, neither casual nor a single event. In addition evaluation must be conducted within the context of well defined and clearly stated objectives whether they are for an individual student or a whole class, whether for a single lesson or a whole program.

Another aspect of the document and the implementation plan which was fully supported by the Director was the requirement that each school develop a school evaluation policy and that this be further refined for divisions or departments. The document states (p.8) "There must be an evaluation plan for the whole school year. This plan must be made available to parents and be communicated to students." With this stand The Etobicoke Board of Education is formally committing itself to accountability to the parents of the students in its schools rather than being accountable to the people in general through the government as represented by the Ministry.

From general issues and educational philosophy, **Making the Grade** goes on to cover a wide variety of materials, techniques and approaches for conducting student evaluations. Included are materials designed to be given to students. This is perhaps an application of the child-centred approach in that the student is seen as an active partner in his or her education and since evaluation is an integral part of education, the student must be involved in evaluation too.

Perhaps this description has made clear the reasons that Etobicoke would be uncomfortable with a centrally developed and imposed examination of students. If the results of such exams were then made availabale to universities as part of their entrance requirements the inevitable two-way flow between teaching and testing would begin to shape what was taught and the optional units and objectives developed and tailored for local groups would be lost.

The tension that may develop could well be between the different branches of the Ministry as much as between the Ministry and the boards. What Etobicoke has done is to elaborate the Ministry philosophy as expressed in their recent curriculum documents. This philosophy may well come into conflict with proposed developments in the use of O.A.I.P.

It is our hope that **Making the Grade** and the discussion it has engendered and the professional development that it has stimulated will help the Ministry to distinguish among the various purposes of evaluation and to keep student evaluation separate from system accountability.

CONCLUSION

Making the Grade is a blueprint for ensuring that The Etobicoke Board of Education philosophy on student evaluation is implemented in Etobicoke schools on a system-wide basis. It also fills the unelaborated Ministry requirements as stated in Ministry curriculum documents for student assessment and evaluation. It places some pressure on the Ministry in terms of its development of future possible standardized testing programs by greatly elaborating both the philosophy and practice of student evaluation for the purposes of assisting the student. It is to be hoped that future Ministry developments in this area will take into account their own philosophy as expressed through their curriculum documents and that it will be consistent with the philosophy of student evaluation as expressed in Etobicoke through Making the Grade.